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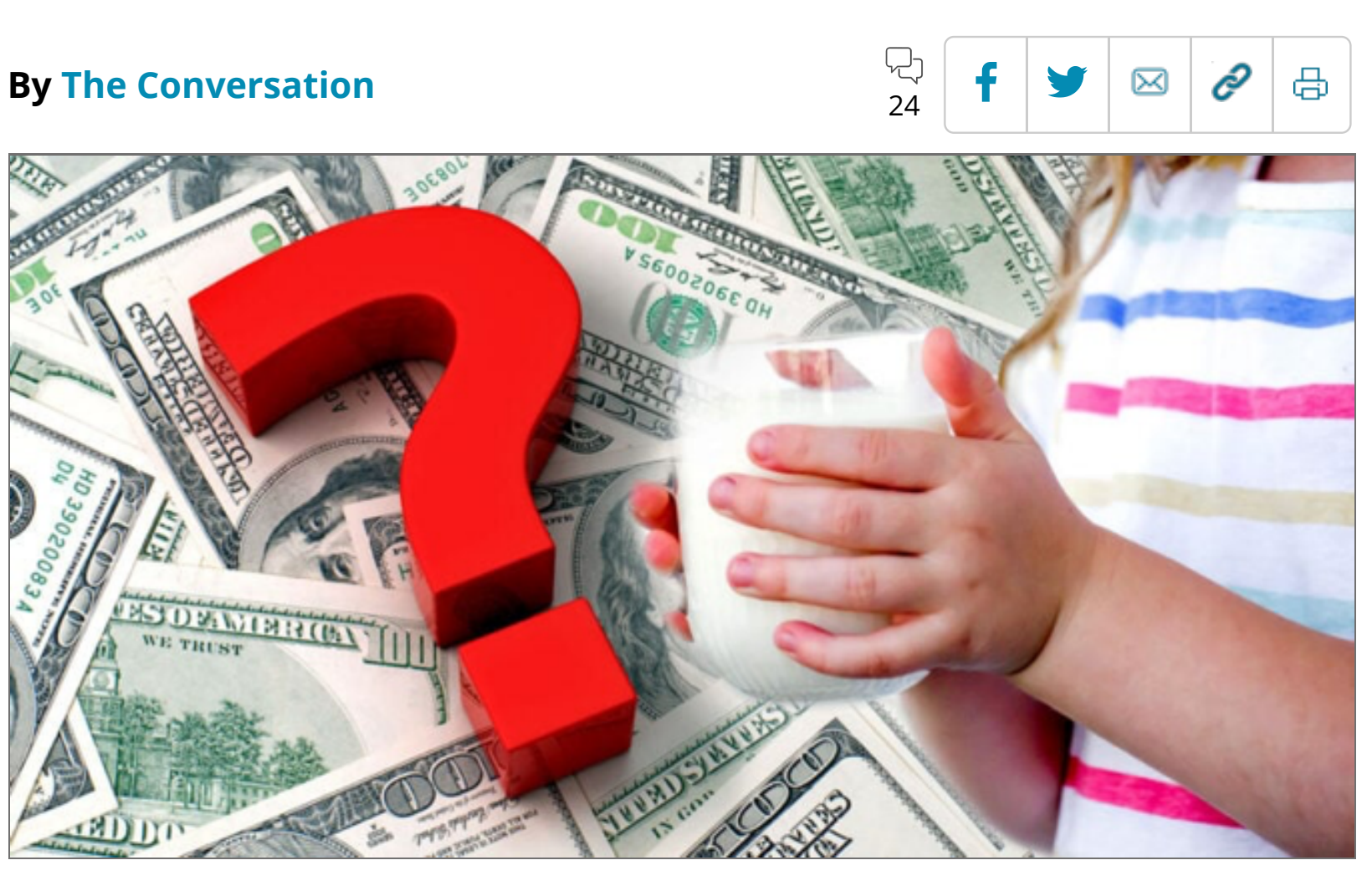
Why Is Ultra-Processed 'Toddler Milk' So Popular? Follow the Money

Misleading marketing claims are behind the surge in sales of "toddler milk," according to pediatricians and public health advocates who said the ultra-processed products are high in sugar and lower in calcium and protein than regular cow's milk.

By The Conversation

24



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By Jennifer McCann, Karleen Gribble and Naomi Hull

Toddler milk is popular and becoming more so. Just over a third of Australian toddlers drink it. Parents spend hundreds of millions of dollars on it globally.

Around the world, toddler milk makes up nearly half of total formula milk sales, with a 200% growth since 2005. Growth is expected to continue.

We're concerned about the growing popularity of toddler milk — about its nutritional content, cost, how it's marketed and about the impact on the health and feeding of young children.

Some of us voiced our concerns on ABC's 7.30 program recently.

But what's in toddler milk? How does it compare to cow's milk? How did it become so popular?

Toddler milks are marketed as beneficial, but they're unnecessar...
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What is toddler milk? Is it healthy?

Toddler milk is marketed as appropriate for children ages 1-3. This ultra-processed food contains:

- skim milk powder (cow, soy or goat).
- vegetable oil.
- sugars (including added sugars).
- emulsifiers (to help bind the ingredients and improve the texture).
- added vitamins and minerals.

Toddler milk is usually lower in calcium and protein, and higher in sugar and calories than regular cow's milk. Depending on the brand, a serving of toddler milk can contain as much sugar as a soft drink.

Even though toddler milk has added vitamins and minerals, these are found in and better absorbed from regular foods and breast milk. Toddlers do not need the level of nutrients found in these products if they are eating a varied diet.

Global health authorities, including the World Health Organization (WHO), and Australia's National Health and Medical Research Council, do not recommend toddler milk for healthy toddlers.

Some children with specific metabolic or dietary medical problems might need tailored alternatives to cow's milk. However, these products generally are not toddler milk and would be a specific product prescribed by a healthcare provider.

Toddler milk is also up to four to five times more expensive than regular cow's milk. "Premium" toddler milk (the same product, with higher levels of vitamins and minerals) is more expensive.

With the cost-of-living crisis, this means families might choose to go without other essentials to afford toddler milk.

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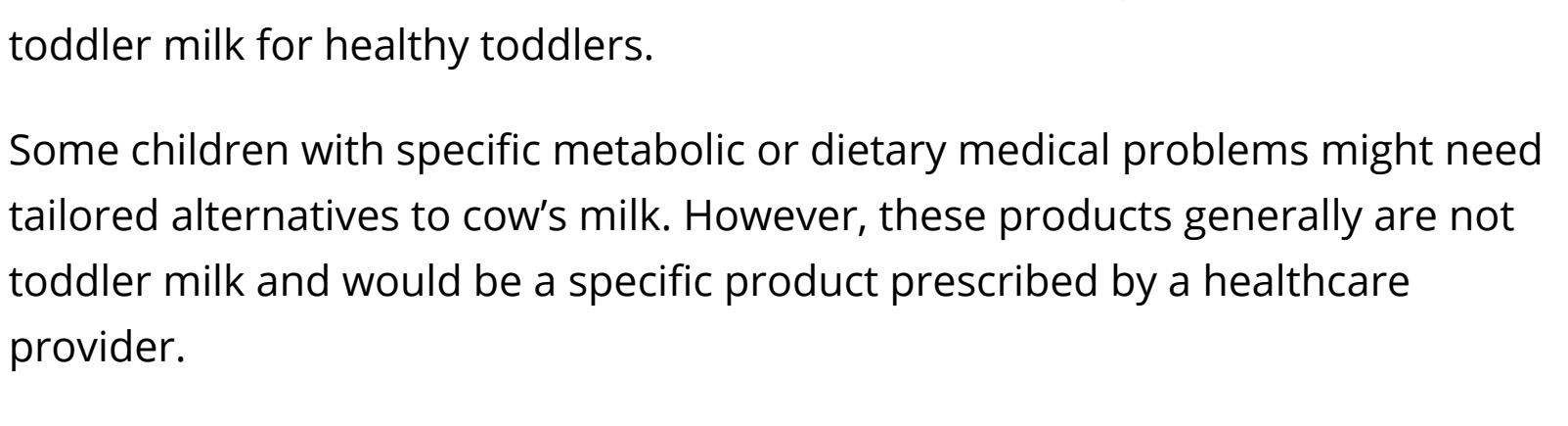

How toddler milk was invented

Toddler milk was created so infant formula companies could get around rules preventing them from advertising their infant formula.

When manufacturers claim benefits of their toddler milk, many parents assume these claimed benefits apply to infant formula (known as cross-promotion). In other words, marketing toddler milk also boosts interest in their infant formula.

Manufacturers also create brand loyalty and recognition by making the labels of their toddler milk look similar to their infant formula. For parents who used infant formula, toddler milk is positioned as the next stage in feeding.

How toddler milk became so popular

Toddler milk is heavily marketed. Parents are told toddler milk is healthy and provides extra nutrition.

Marketing tells parents it will benefit their child's growth and development, their brain function and their immune system.

Toddler milk is also presented as a solution to fussy eating, which is common in toddlers.

However, regularly drinking toddler milk could increase the risk of fussiness as it reduces opportunities for toddlers to try new foods. It's also sweet, needs no chewing, and essentially displaces the energy and nutrients that whole foods provide.

Growing concern

The WHO, along with public health academics, has been raising concerns about the marketing of toddler milk for years.

In Australia, moves to curb how toddler milk is promoted have gone nowhere. Toddler milk is in a category of foods that are allowed to be fortified (to have vitamins and minerals added), with no marketing restrictions.

The Australian Competition & Consumer Commission also has concerns about the rise of toddler milk marketing.

Despite this, there is no change in how it's regulated. This is in contrast to voluntary marketing restrictions in Australia for infant formula.

"The Wuhan Cover-Up"
by Robert F. Kennedy Jr.

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What needs to happen?

There is enough evidence to show the marketing of commercial milk formula, including toddler milk, influences parents and undermines child health.

So governments need to act to protect parents from this marketing and to put child health over profits.

Public health authorities and advocates, including us, are calling for the restriction of marketing (not selling) of all formula products for infants and toddlers from birth through age 3.

Ideally, this would be mandatory, government-enforced marketing restrictions as opposed to industry self-regulation in place currently for infant formulas.

We mustn't blame parents

Toddlers are eating more processed foods (including toddler milk) than ever because time-poor parents are seeking a convenient option to ensure their child is getting adequate nutrition.

Formula manufacturers have used this information and created a demand for an unnecessary product.

Parents want to do the best for their toddlers, but they need to know the marketing behind toddler milk is misleading.

Toddler milk is an unnecessary, unhealthy and expensive product. Toddlers just need whole foods and breastmilk, and/or cow's milk or a non-dairy milk alternative.

If parents are worried about their child's eating, they should see a health-care professional.

Originally published by The Conversation.

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Karleen Gribble is an adjunct associate professor at the School of Nursing and Midwifery at Western Sydney University.

Naomi Hull is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Sydney.

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of Children's Health Defense.

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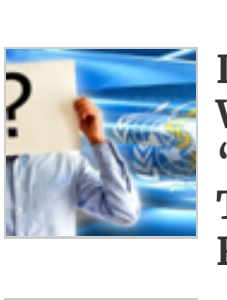

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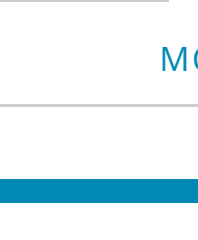

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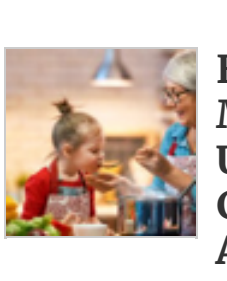

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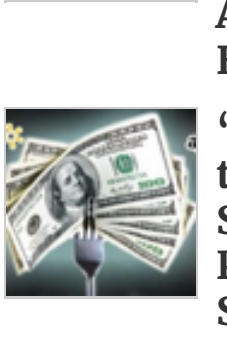

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Caroline Cary Davidson
a month ago
I've never even heard of this stuff. is this only in Australia? or are they talking about things like Pediasure? because I know that crap is full of corn syrup and synthetic 'vitamins'. yuk! here's a radical idea - how about feeding your kids ACTUAL FOOD.
4 0 Reply

tag → Caroline Cary Davidson
a month ago
Exactly! My second would not touch that garbage "meat" baby food. I slow cook some beef till it was falling apart and she like food never tasted so good...To this day at 41 years old, she is so all about REAL food! What a bad mom I was!
0 0 Reply

boxerdoglover
a month ago
Just wow, toddler milk is everything you don't want your child to ingest. This world has gone crazy.
4 0 Reply

tag → boxerdoglover
a month ago
Not crazy. INSANE!
0 0 Reply

Marie blaszak
a month ago
In 1971 I breast fed my son till he was two and a half. He got one dpt shot at age one and got so sick with a high fever for 3 days he never got another shot. He was a healthy child. I got him raw milk from a farmer. It was easy in those days to lie to the school and say he had all his shots. They never checked and we didn't have computers then.
3 0 Reply

tag → Marie blaszak
a month ago
I remember the day when I could go to a local dairy, take my pitcher and dip the raw milk out of the large vat and leave my money on the counter. And today? We call this country free?
0 0 Reply

Beatrice → tag
a month ago
My third grade teacher took us- the entire class- to her family's dairy farm to milk cows and drink raw milk.
1 0 Reply

Molly Pitcher
a month ago
Why are seniors put on the adult crap of the toddler Form. Ensure, Boost, etc, are the same crap only in adult form, neither tastes good either.
2 0 Reply

Put that in your pipe → Molly Pitcher
a month ago
In ultra old age, some people need food they don't have to chew. You can either buy it or make it yourself. Those are your only your choices. You can get handy with blender recipes and hope your loved one is not too picky or sickly to eat / drink it. Hospitals are certainly too busy to custom blend food for your loved one. They won't even take the noodles out of their own soup. So if you don't prepare it daily yourself, of course a big corporation will step in to sell you or the hospital something.
1 0 Reply

Beatrice → Put that in your pipe
a month ago
I'm old :D and I drink Orgain. I keep several cases of it on hand because it gives me something to put on my stomach when I have to take my supplements. I don't drink it every day but it makes life a lot easier when I need a meal replacement.
1 0 Reply

Put that in your pipe → Beatrice
a month ago
Thank you, I will look into that one, I hadn't thought about other brands, just the need for the industry itself. The need is real. 👍
0 0 Reply

Beatrice → Put that in your pipe
a month ago
When it comes to any processed convenience food, we must shop around for the most healthy product. Orgain may not be healthier than fresh organic fruits and veg but it's healthy and safer than the other popular brands. The problem most consumers face is the cost of these healthier brands. I can usually find Orgain for around 30 dollars or a little less per case, delivered.
1 0 Reply

Put that in your pipe → Beatrice
a month ago
Yeah, shopping around and waiting for delivery takes time, but then it saves on the blender prep time. I have been mixing smoothies / shakes myself in a blender for my loved one - whey powder (for protein), vit C powder (many good reasons), collagen powder (rebuilds skin) dissolved in black tea (reduces blood sugar spikes), frozen bananas and blueberries (minerals, antioxidants, quercetin). We might also try a vegetable one using cucumber, tomato, spirulina, a little sea salt, in place of the blueberries & bananas.
1 0 Reply

Beatrice → Put that in your pipe
a month ago
Sounds yummy. I don't add bananas anymore because of the sugar content but they are healthiest when green. I add a mushroom powder and chia seeds to the veggies and fruits. I don't use whey powder because I don't need any protein. I add grass fed collagen to my hot tea and coffee too! I also take vitamin c with each cup. Celery is a great veggie to add. I don't know why people don't rave about the benefits of celery and celery juice. However, it does increase urination which could be a nuisance :(
1 0 Reply

Beatrice → Put that in your pipe
a month ago
They make a version for children too.
1 0 Reply

Beckie
a month ago
In the presentation they said cow's milk is the right product to feed a child when they turn one year old - maybe if you want ear infections. Every parent giving their child goat milk instead knows that using goat milk instead prevents ear infections. That was sure true for my 2 kids.
2 0 Reply

Molly Pitcher → Beckie
a month ago
My 3 boys had a hard time digesting formulas and Holestine milk, tried goat milk, no luck. Turns out skim powdered milk worked best. Nor did they have ear infections. Just the usual teething ones. Word of warning you go to the ER because you think your 5-month-old has an ear infection, MAKE THEM RUN A MENIGITIST TEST. Hospital 1, poo-poo the ear infection as teething, Hospital 2 her grandma insisted as her fever spiked, ran the Menegitist test, she nearly died, 1 month in the hospital, has speech issues, lower IQ now.
0 0 Reply

Beatrice → Molly Pitcher
a month ago
Molly, your comment is so interesting to me because I have heard of so many recent (as in last 2 years) cases of meningitis that were undetected by doctors- even in the ER! This story is way too common. What the hey? Meningitis is not difficult to diagnose even by simply observing clinical symptoms. This is scary. Are doctors poorly trained? Are they not spending enough time with patients, not paying attention to symptoms? The thought that a child would die because a doctor misdiagnosed meningitis is truly sickening.
0 0 Reply

BChristine
a month ago edited
Disgusting ... start your child's life with this ultra-processed crap, and see how quickly they become obese and sick; not to mention indoctrinating them into the sick world of processed food!

If the CDC is not recommending it (*surprise there*); how can the manufacturers get away with promoting it?
2 0 Reply

tag → BChristine
a month ago
$$
0 0 Reply

Molly Pitcher → BChristine
a month ago
Bribes to congress of course.
0 0 Reply

tag
a month ago
Toddler milk? Give me a break. Cash cow for the clowns that invented it. I was raised on raw milk as were my children b. 1980 and 1983, Both ate from the table by 1 year. Today it seems a baby should eat the processed "baby food" garbage over healthy cooking until they are like 5? Mom's and Mom's to be...use your own instinct's, provided to you by nature and raise your children without the main stream media propaganda. And while you are at it, toss the Dr. Spock etc. BS.
1 0 Reply

Beatrice → tag
a month ago
Yes, very important for kids to start chewing food as early as possible. The development of the jaw bone and muscles affects the teeth alignment in adulthood. When the kids eat soft processed foods all this important development is stalled. Chicken nuggets doesn't qualify as food that needs to be chewed. The food needs to have enough toughness to cause the child to tear it and chew it for more than a few seconds. Ever wonder why most people didn't have severely crooked teeth in the 1800's? My grandmother had straight teeth until her late 80's/early 90's.
1 0 Reply

mary5920
a month ago
How lovely. Before they're even born, the mother is given a perfect formula of b.s. tailored to make money for BigPharma. Using fear, appeal to authority, and all the other tricks of the trade, mom & pop get talked into unnecessary and unhealthy interventions.

So toddler formula is promoted instead of extended breast feeding, naturally. No doubt with lots of music and the word "natural" tossed around.
1 0 Reply

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